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**To:** Chair NYC MTA  
**Subject:** Briefing Memo on the GoSMRT MTA Initiative 2022  
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### **Summary**

The GoSMRT MTA Initiative is an effort to recover ridership to 100% of pre-pandemic levels. The initiative will ensure NYC commuters a safe, reliable, and cost-efficient form of travel around each of the five boroughs. By leveraging a sound assessment strategy, calling on several leadership levers, and achieving immediate wins, we can increase utilization of MTA services and achieve our goal of 100% pre-pandemic ridership.

The following are my recommendations for action using the [Reference Projection] approach:

- **Take a measure of *what is* vs. *what should be*:** To begin, we should use the McKinsey MTA report as a guide to determine i.) what our current ridership is, and ii.) what level of ridership we're going to be the "new normal" (McKinsey & Company, 2020). We should assess what the outcome would likely be if we did nothing, taking into consideration the revenue lost and the operational spillover effects due to reduced ridership. Looking forward, we should define a [Vision of Value] to imagine an MTA system in which a return to pre-pandemic 100% ridership occurs in the near and long term.
- **Define measurable and achievable stretch goals that inspire the community:** Defining measurable and achievable "stretch goals" can rally all members of our community and motivate them to get behind reaching optimal MTA ridership. How do we deliver messaging to encourage ridership? How do we assure the public that MTA resources are safe and effective? How do we improve safety and security protocols within the public transit apparatus? What achievable, immediate wins will garner the most support?
- **Provide a clear and ambiguous roadmap to achieving objectives:** What will the path to 100% ridership look like? How would this progress be interrupted by COVID-19 resurgence? We should summarize the above points and the following objectives into a concise mission statement that is transparent and available to government officials, agency partners, and the public.

### **The Opportunity**

By leveraging the GoSMRT Initiative and recovering to full pre-COVID-19 ridership, we can:

- Improve transportation efficiency and effectiveness for all New Yorkers
- Increase revenue for the MTA, New York City, New York state, and the national economy more broadly
- Provide jobs to transport employees around the city
- Re-establish the MTA as a safe and effective mode of transportation

## The Requirements

Before taking any action, we must identify the knowns, unknowns, and presumptions leveraging Neustadt and May's [Triad of Facts]. Has work-from-home altered the course of public transportation moving forward? Will people ever feel safe boarding crowded subway trains and buses post-pandemic? Is the introduction of new MTA payment methods contributing to the slow recovery? Are there other factors at play that could prevent recovery of ridership?

Leveraging [Moore's Strategic Triangle] to assess the organizational soundness of 1) Legitimacy & Support, 2) Public Value, and 3) Operational Capabilities will ensure we are in the best position to recover ridership:

- **Technical:** Do we have the technical capability (remote communications, data systems, monitoring infrastructure) to effectively collaborate with Commission members and assess the effectiveness of GoSMRT initiatives?
- **Operating:** What are the steps our team and agency partners would need to make to establish the Commission for increasing ridership?
- **Governance:** Can a multi-agency relationship be managed around the GoSMRT Initiative? Who's in charge? Who oversees the activation of ridership programs?
- **Legal/Regulatory:** What are the issues relating to health and safety concerns and litigation?
- **Social/Political:** How do we call our network into existence? How do we energize the community to gain legitimacy and engagement?
- **Financial:** Calculating the total cost of all city systems today versus one system tomorrow? How can Smart Street Lamps provide a roadmap for cost savings and community improvements further downstream?

## Levers of Power

In applying our proposed strategy, we should reference the following from [David Young's 7 Leadership Levers for Change]:

- **Strategy Formulation:** What are the MTA's perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats through the lens of the public, internal teams, and the newly established Committee? How can we take an ["Outside View"] to control for our own biases and desired outcomes? What is an objective baseline for success in optimizing public transit ridership (Kahneman, 2011)?
- **Motivation:** To achieve successful implementation of The GoSMRT Initiative, we need to build a culture of commitment within our immediate teams, our partners, and the public who will be utilizing MTA services. Referencing Walton's "Keys to the Game" for building a high commitment workplace, we should aim to remove layers of hierarchy, maintain complete transparency, encourage participation, and hold teams responsible for performance as is reflected in group achievement. Citing John Linder's work with the NYPD, it is necessary to promise anonymity in exchange for uncensored opinion, thereby minimizing the halo effect and social norms bias that can occur in the presence of authority figures. By allowing MTA council members, Commission partners, and the public the opportunity to participate in formulating and application of strategy, they will be intrinsically rewarded through the satisfaction that comes with contributing to positive outcomes in their community. On the public side, we can reach New Yorkers by appealing to their feelings. For example, John Linder launched a \$4 million TV ad

campaign asserting that “real New Yorkers ride the subway,” contributing to an increase in ridership of 9.7 percent.

- **Culture Management:** To establish buy-in from those who will decide the success or failure of this initiative, the public and the MTA’s organization structure, we must incorporate a common culture and value set that everyone can get behind. To build this support, we should define an achievable objective that can get everyone moving in the same direction. By delivering some results fast, we can build momentum early on and drive toward larger objectives, as Mike Krieger was able to do in strengthening U.S. port security (William Bratton, 2012).

## **Options for Action**

Our options for action and key opportunities/costs are as follows:

### **1. Immediate Action: Build Commission and Activate Pilots**

#### a. Opportunities:

- i. Immediate results to build support and momentum, obtain situational awareness for pilot location/s
- ii. Comparative analysis to McKinsey, other public transit initiatives
- iii. Authorizing both allows comparative analysis, A/B testing among pilots, RCTs

#### b. Costs:

- i. Higher costs
- ii. More data and infrastructure to manage
- iii. Inference on populations doesn’t always tell complete story. Authorizing more pilots is the best option.

### **2. Partial Action: Build Commission and Hold Information Sessions**

#### a. Opportunities:

- i. Increased knowledge gathering and discussion
- ii. Lower cost than running pilots
- iii. Less data and infrastructure to manage

#### b. Costs:

- i. Limited insight
- ii. Inference on populations doesn’t always tell complete story. Authorizing more pilots is best option.

### **3. Delayed Action: Conserve Resources and Hold for Future Learnings**

#### a. Opportunities:

- i. Assure all parties agree upon larger plan of action
- ii. As other cities launch initiatives to increase ridership, we analyze and gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies that could work in NYC

#### b. Costs

- i. Delay public transit gains
- ii. No immediate insight to build support and momentum
- iii. Fall behind the public transit curve of more progressive US cities

## **Recommendations and Next Steps**

The following are recommended steps to producing results as quickly as possible while gaining insight and working toward broader MTA solutions.

1. **Define the problem we're solving:** Construct a one sentence statement that is simple to understand, is achievable, and allows all parties to get behind immediately, such as “*Let’s build situational awareness of MTA ridership trends in <A> and <B> communities.*”
2. **Identify the base-rate for success:** Use learnings and evidence from McKinsey and external sources to understand the base-rate of success for public transit initiatives that increase ridership. Daniel Kahneman (Kahneman, 2011) suggests the following:
  - Identify an appropriate reference class
  - Obtain the statistics of the reference class (optimal ridership pre-, during, and post-COVID-19, cost savings, public sentiment/polling).
  - Use specific information about proposed initiatives to adjust our baseline prediction — if there are reasons to expect the optimistic bias to be more or less pronounced in this project than in others of the same type.
3. **Scope a capability:** [“Right-size”] the problem by identifying the appropriate parties and channels that can streamline implementations and results. Do we limit the Commission to a small group of specialists, or expand to outside consultants and firms, in line with Commander Suzanne Englebert’s strategy improving maritime security apparatus post-9/11 (John D. Donahue, 2012)?
4. **Lead with a message and commitment to transit safety:** If we commit to and effectively communicate our dedication to improving safety, as Paul O’Neill did with the Alcoa organization (Pamela Varley, 1992), we can build a level of trust among NYC commuters that will increase ridership, and open up opportunities for further development and implementation of public transit capabilities in the future.
5. **Call network into existence:** Devise and communicate a narrative through success stories that will gain legitimacy by engaging the relevant agencies, officials, community leaders, and most importantly, the public (John D. Donahue, 2012). Reach New Yorkers on an emotional level to empower and motivate them, example: “real New Yorkers take the subway.” And as learned in the case of GovTech’s COVID-19 contact tracing system in Singapore, installing an information system with data available to the public can build public trust and inspire further adoption of MTA services.
6. **Scale and evolve:** Scale proven methods from GoSMRT to more communities while continuing to pilot new initiatives that can increase ridership across the city.

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